PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

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INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY REPORT ON PATENTABILITY

(Chapter II of the Patent Cooperation Treaty)

(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 2003P00797 WO	FOR FURTHER ACTION	See Form PCT/PEA/416
International application No. PCT/EP2004/052752	International filing date (day/month/year) 02.11.2004	Priority date (day/month/year) 31.10.2003

International Patent Classification (IPC) or national classification and IPC

G06F17/60

Applicant

SAP AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT et al.

1. This report is the international preliminary examination report, established by this International Preliminary Examining Authority under Article 35 and transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.

2. This REPORT consists of a total of 7 sheets, including this cover sheet.

3. This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, comprising:

   a. ☒ *sent to the applicant and to the International Bureau)* a total of 2 sheets, as follows:

      ☒ sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis of this report and/or sheets containing rectifications authorized by this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions).

      ☐ sheets which supersede earlier sheets, but which this Authority considers contain an amendment that goes beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed, as indicated in item 4 of Box No. I and the Supplemental Box.

   b. ☐ *(sent to the International Bureau only)* a total of (indicate type and number of electronic carrier(s)) , containing a sequence listing and/or tables related thereto, in computer readable form only, as indicated in the Supplemental Box Relating to Sequence Listing (see Section 802 of the Administrative Instructions).

4. This report contains indications relating to the following items:

   ☒ Box No. I   Basis of the opinion

   ☐ Box No. II   Priority

   ☐ Box No. III   Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability

   ☐ Box No. IV   Lack of unity of invention

   ☒ Box No. V   Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

   ☐ Box No. VI   Certain documents cited

   ☐ Box No. VII   Certain defects in the international application

   ☐ Box No. VIII   Certain observations on the international application

Date of submission of the demand 23.05.2005	Date of completion of this report 31.08.2005
Name and mailing address of the International preliminary examining authority: European Patent Office D-80298 Munich Tel. +49 89 2399 - 0 Tx: 523656 epmu d Fax: +49 89 2399 - 4465	Authorized Officer Hopper, E Telephone No. +49 89 2399-7565

Box No. I   Basis of the report

1. With regard to the **language**, this report is based on the international application in the language in which it was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

   □   This report is based on translations from the original language into the following language , which is the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of:
   - □ international search (under Rules 12.3 and 23.1(b))
   - □ publication of the international application (under Rule 12.4)
   - □ international preliminary examination (under Rules 55.2 and/or 55.3)

2. With regard to the **elements*** of the international application, this report is based on *(replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report):*

   Description, Pages

1, 2, 4-32	as originally filed
3	received on 01.03.2005 with letter of 23.02.2005

   Claims, Numbers

1	received on 13.07.2005 with letter of 05.07.2005

   Drawings, Sheets

1/7-7/7	as originally filed

   □   a sequence listing and/or any related table(s) - see Supplemental Box Relating to Sequence Listing

3. □   The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:
   - □ the description, pages
   - □ the claims, Nos.
   - □ the drawings, sheets/figs
   - □ the sequence listing *(specify)*:
   - □ any table(s) related to sequence listing *(specify)*:

4. □   This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments annexed to this report and listed below had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed, as indicated in the Supplemental Box (Rule 70.2(c)).
   - □ the description, pages
   - □ the claims, Nos.
   - □ the drawings, sheets/figs
   - □ the sequence listing *(specify)*:
   - □ any table(s) related to sequence listing *(specify)*:

   *   *If item 4 applies, some or all of these sheets may be marked "superseded."*

Box No. V   Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Yes:	Claims	1-29
	No:	Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes:	Claims	
	No:	Claims	1-29
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes:	Claims	1-29
	No:	Claims	

2. Citations and explanations (Rule 70.7):

see separate sheet

Re Item V
Reasoned statement with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

Reference is made to the following document:
D1: EP-A-1164519

Article 33(3) PCT

1. Claim 1 is directed at a method of administrative nature, i.e. a method for processing of invoices.

    Claim 1 defines the administrative steps underlying the processing of invoices, i.e. to select an invoice according to some selection criteria in order to prioritise the cash collection of outstanding invoices (see also p. 1, line 29 - p. 2, line 3; p. 3, lines 6 - 25; p. 9, line 30 - p. 10, line 2).

    The examiner acknowledges that the subject-matter of claim 1 has technical character in that a method defines a "computerized processing of invoices" and is implemented in a computer system. However, the administrative method itself remains a method for which the International Searching Authority is not required to search an international application since it is directed to a mental act (Rule 39 (iii) PCT; Article 17(2)(a)(i) PCT).

    It is noted that throughout the entire application as filed there is no hint of any solution to any technical problem and the only aspect of the application that confers a technical character to the subject-matter of the application is the need for technical consideration with regards of the <u>implementation</u> of the administrative procedure <u>in a computer system</u>.

2. A claim comprising a mix of both technical and non-technical features requires an examination of the technical character of the claim in order to determine those features that are relevant for assessment of inventive step.

3. Non-technical features may be considered as features that do not contribute to the technical character of a claim. Such non-technical features must satisfy the following two requirements:

   (i) A feature or group of features that, considered independently from the group of remaining features of the claim, define subject-matter which falls under Rule 39 PCT.

   (ii) A feature or group of features that does not combine with the group of remaining features of the claim in a way such that the new combination of features has a different technical character to that of the group of remaining features of the claim when considered on its own.

4. It is clear that claim 1 is of technical character in so far the subject-matter of the claim is directed to the computer implementation of an administrative method/ mental act (see item 1).

   a. The administrative method/ mental act (i.e. the non-technical features) of claim 1 is defined as a method for processing of invoices, which a company has presented to two or more customers comprising:
      - selecting from a plurality of data records comprising invoice data of said invoices such data records, the entry of a due date field of which is within a preselectable time or on a preselectable date and which data record has a first state is assigned in the state field,
      - assigning a second state to said selected data records according to predefineable conditions,
      - presenting the data records having a certain first and/ or second state.

   b. The method defines an administrative method or a purely mental act. Mental acts fall under the list of exclusions provided in Rule 39 PCT. The features of the method do not combine in any way with the group of remaining features of the claim (general purpose computer system) to alter the technical character of the claim from that of a

general purpose computer system. Therefore the group of features set out in 4a above are considered to be non-technical.

c.   The technical character of the claim resides in the <u>implementation</u> of the mental act <u>in a general purpose computer system</u> (cf. p. 6, lines 8 - 12).

d.   The closest prior art is therefore considered to be a general purpose computer system comprising a plurality of general purpose computers and a computer network. Such a general purpose computer system was well known before the priority date of the application (31.10.2003) as not to require written evidence.

e.   Features which cannot be seen to make any contribution, either independently or in combination with other features, to the solution of a technical problem are not relevant for assessing inventive step. The administrative method/ mental act described in 4a above is therefore not relevant for assessing inventive step. The method may therefore be described in the problem to be solved and is considered as a non-technical specification that is provided to the person skilled in the art of data processing such that the skilled person may provide an <u>automated</u> version of the method.

f.   An objective technical problem to be solved may be considered as how to implement the administrative method/ mental act described in 4a in a general purpose computer system.

g.   Implementing administrative functions or functions describing mental acts through standard programming techniques into a general purpose computer system is a typical task carried out be the person skilled in the art of data processing. Thus, the skilled person presented with the above problem and the requirements specification would solve the problem by providing all functions described in the requirements specification through use of standard programming techniques (such as representing an invoice and its plurality of data records in the form of an electronic data structure comprising various data fields; assigning a state to a data field e.g. for identifying said record in a subsequent retrieval step) and would thus arrive at the subject-matter of the claim 1 without making an inventive step. The claimed technical solution does not

go beyond the concept of a mere automation of constraints imposed by the administrative procedure (Article 33(3) PCT).

5. Further Observations re. Inventive Step

a. The application as a whole does not disclose any particular implementational details of the data processing operations at the computer on the network or within the computer system which might indicate that the claimed invention involves any non obvious technical considerations or provides any non obvious technical effects. This applies in particular to the generation of data structures for the purpose of representing the data records of an invoice in a form suitable for automated data processing within a general purpose computer system. The implementation of the invoice data records into such a data structure merely requires standard programming skills.

b. Should written evidence be required for the existence of such a general purpose computer system the applicant is referred to e.g. D1 (para. 9).

which are due within a preselectable time or on a
preselectable date and to which a first state is
assigned, and assigning a second state to said selected
invoices.

5

Applying the methods, e.g. by using the system, is
insofar advantageous as the introduction of this state
concept greatly reduces the expenditures for search and
querying the data bases and increases the system

10 performance, particularly if huge amounts of invoices
have to be screened.
Further, the collection of outstanding cash independent
of a specific customer is made easier. A company can
focus its capacity of cash collection on such invoices,

15 which are considered to be most important with respect
to its turnover. The invention allows a company to have
an overview over critical invoices duly before the
respective due dates, so that measures to ensure
punctual payment can be taken in good time. Further,

20 the management of the respective company can get an
improved day sales outstanding, a better management of
liquidity, an improved credit risk management through
more transparency, better customer profiling through
company owned credit scores, better accounts receivable

25 reporting and a better communication with customers.

Embodiments of the invention are further directed to a
computer system, a computer program, a computer
readable medium and a carrier signal , each comprising

30 program code or instructions for computerized
processing of invoices, which a company has presented
to two or more customers according to the above method
and its embodiments. The invention is further directed
to an electronic data structure having one or more data

35 fields fro one or more states.

EPO - DG 1

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What is claimed is:

1. A method for computerized processing of invoices,
    which a company has presented to two or more
    customers, within a computer network, comprising:
5   - automatically selecting from a plurality of data
    records comprising invoice data of said invoices
    such data records, the entry of a due date field of
    which is within a preselectable time or on a
    preselectable date and which data record has a
10 first state assigned in a state field,
    - automatically assigning a second state to said
    selected data records according to predefineable
    conditions, said first and/or second state being
    represented by an entry into a respective data
15 field of the data record of the respective invoice,
    and
    - automatically presenting the data records having
    a certain first and/or second state to a network
    computer.

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AMENDED SHEET

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